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Resembling Legitimacy: Restructuring the American Civic Architectural Myth

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Resembling Legitimacy

*Restructuring the American Civic
Architectural Myth*

ESTEFANY LONA

Advised by:

Terrance Goode

Susan Henderson

David Shanks

Resembling Legitimacy

*Restructuring the American Civic
Architectural Myth*

13



Contention:
Context

07



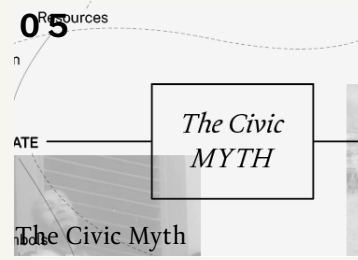
Case Studies:
E.U.R

04



Introduction

05



The Civic Myth

06



Research

07



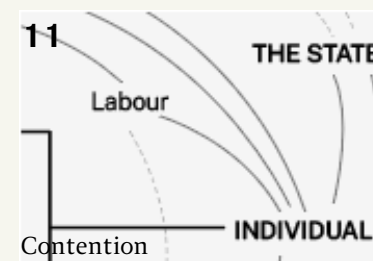
Case Studies

10



Afterlife

11



Contention

15



Proposal

17



Schedule

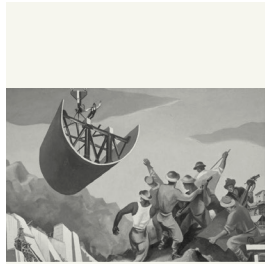
18



Bibliography



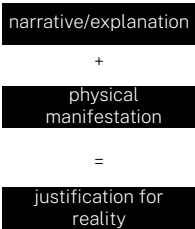
Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton University Press, 2004), 200.



myth, n.

A traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology, or justification for something such as the early history of a society, a religious belief or ritual, or a natural phenomenon.

Oxford Dictionary



MYTHS, ARE NARRATIVES COMPOSED OF FICTITIOUS ELEMENTS TO SUPPLEMENT THE EXPLANATION OF A REALITY. BY THIS INTERPRETATION, MYTHS CAN BE EMBODIED BY OUR BUILT ENVIRONMENT, AS THEIR ASPIRATIONAL METAPHORS SERVE AS THE FICTIONAL ELEMENTS TOWARDS REAL SOCIAL PROMISE AND POTENTIAL.

The term “myth” in contemporary architectural writing has three interpretations:

- an error of belief
- a cultural given; a cosmology or symbolic fable handed down from primordial time
- a contemporary narrative which legitimately influences arcitectural design

Iris Aravot, “Interpretations of Myth in Contemporary Architectural Writing” Journal of Architectural and Planning Research, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Winter, 1996): 271-290

“Hence, the totality—the fullness of man—is not in the separate member, but in the body of the society as a whole...” From his group he has derived his techniques of life, the language in which he thinks, the ideas on which he thrives; through the past of that society descended the genes that built his body. If he presumes to cut himself off, either in deed or in thought and feeling, he only breaks connection with the sources of his existence.”

Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton University Press, 2004), 200.

“Seizing on this distinction and adding to it deistic and Romantic assumptions about the value of wild country, nationalists argued that far from being a liability, wilderness was actually an American asset. Of course, pride continued to stem from the conquest of wild country (see Chapter 2), but by the middle decades of the nineteenth century wilderness was recognized as a cultural and moral resource and a basis for national self-esteem.”

Nash, Roderick. Wilderness and the American Mind. Fifth. (Yale University Press, 2014), 59.

E. U. R.

Esposizione Universale Roma
Architect/Planner: Marcello Piacentini
Begun: 1937

narrative/explanation

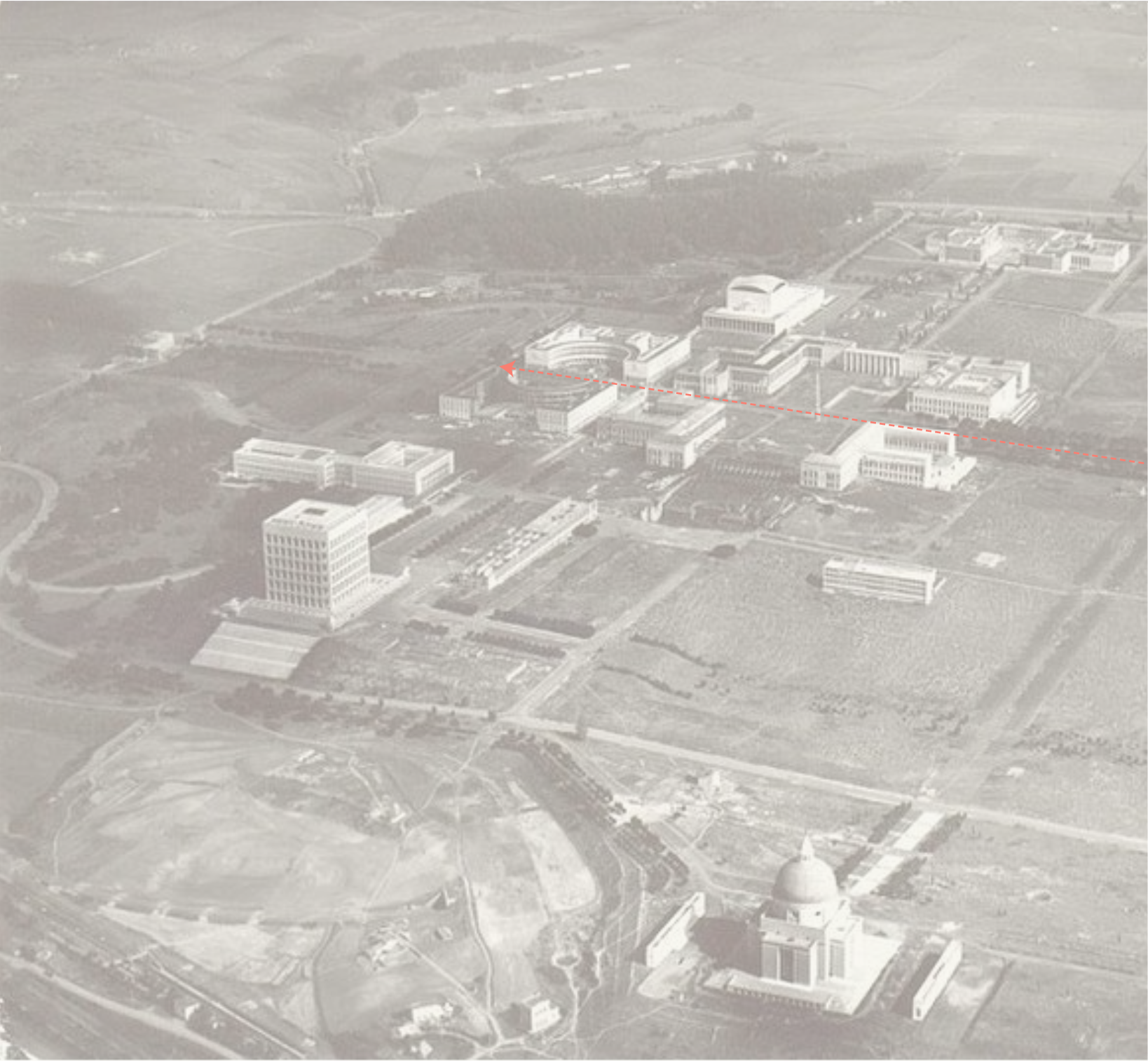
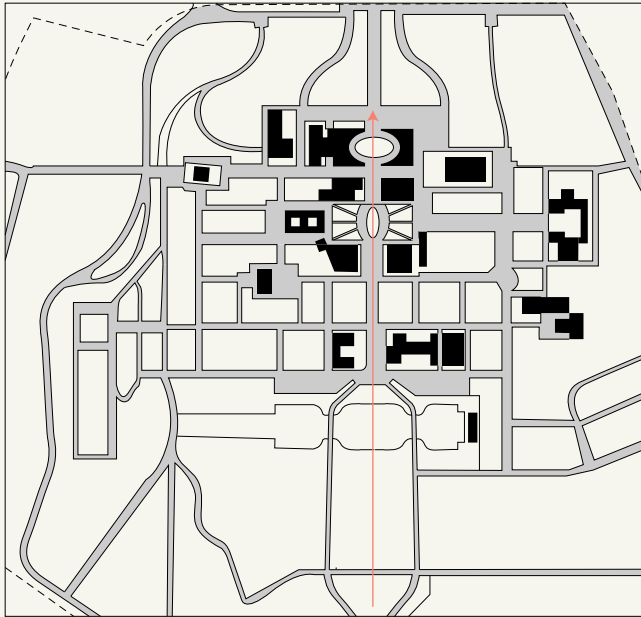
Rome's Italian heritage and imperial past.

physical
manifestation

Materials, arches, column rhythms

justification for
reality

Intended to be the main attraction the the 1942 world's fair, the district appropriates much of imperial Rome's architectural heritage to embody under a rich Italian identity the authority of the state (and thereby Fascism).



Icons/Symbols



Representative of idealized citizens
Reference to historical figures

Nationalism



Nationalization of private industry
Slogans in public space
Appropriation of Ancient Roman styles

Imagery



Post Cards
Posters
Champion Labourer

Ritual



Tourism Administration
Encouraged regional festivals
Costume

Material



Travertine
Rationalism

Planning



Rigid street plan
Wide roads for military use
Main roads connect govt. office and historical landmarks

E. U. R.

Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana
Architect/Planner: Giovanni Guerrini, Ernesto Bruno La Padula and Mario Romano
Begun: 1937
narrative/explanation

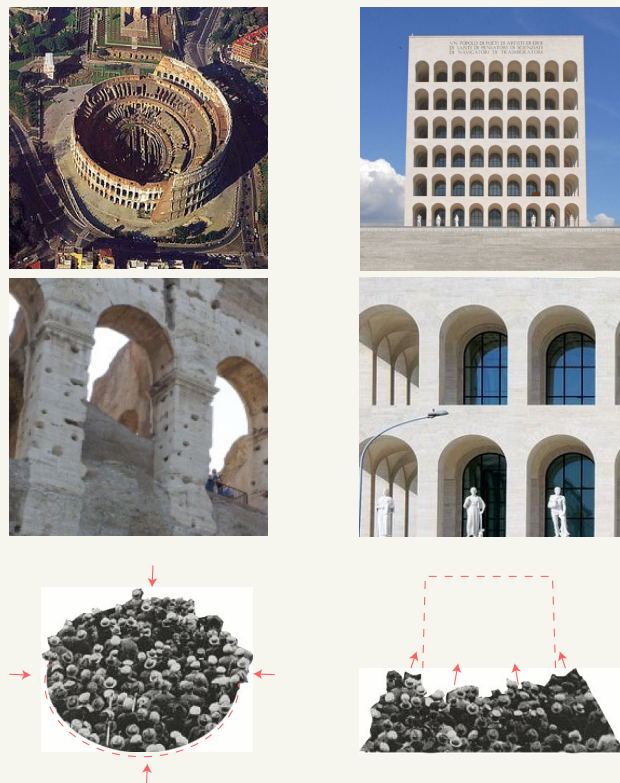
Rome's Italian herritage and imperial past.

physical
manifestation

A rationalist version of the Colosseum

justification for
reality

Intended to be the main attraction the the 1942 world's fair, the district appropriates much of imperial Rome's architectural herritage to embody under a rich Italian identity the authority of the state (and thereby Fascism).



"a nation of poets, of artists, of heroes, of saints, of thinkers, of scientists, of navigators, of transmigrators"

Icons/Symbols



Representative of idealized citizens

Reference to historical figures

Nationalism



Nationalization of private industry

Slogans in public space

Appropriation of Ancient Roman styles

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Rigid street plan

Wide roads for military use

Main roads connect state and historical landmarks

U. S. A

The New Deal
WPA (Works Progress Administration) Head: Harry Hopkins
Start-End: 1935 - 45

narrative/explanation

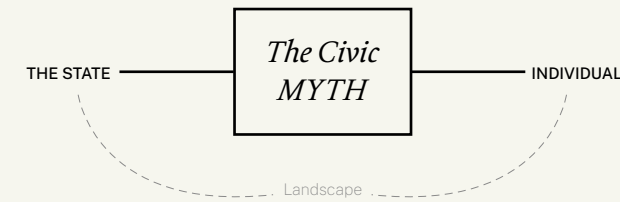
America is resilient, and made up of industrious individuals

physical
manifestation

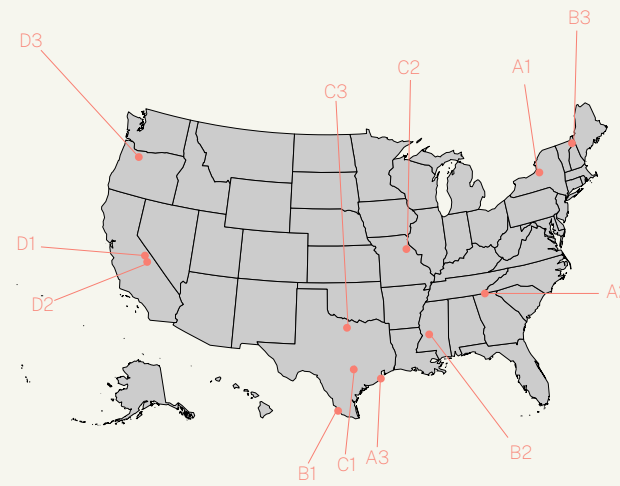
Employment, new public spaces & buildings, image of government
stability, adoption of moderne style

justification for
reality

A selective “usable past” of American characteristics were
highlighted by WPA projects to project a convincing image of
government stability and justify national pride through
contribution to the labour force.



Selected works by WPA



Courthouse



Post Office



Gyms



National Parks



THE STATE

Facade

INDIVIDUAL



Material

Marble used extensively
in administrative
buildings

Aluminum

Wood

Brick

‘Strong’ figures

Native American faces

Judicial references



Statues / Relief

“have some relation to
modern justice; or to the
past; or local history, past
or present; local industry,
or pursuits. This may be
interpreted freely.”

Social Realism style

Predella storytelling

Indicative of region or
function of building
relateable to user



Murals



Motifs

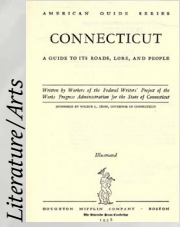
WPA Guides documented
history and areas of interest
that characterize each state

7% percent of The New Deal
budget went to federal arts
and history projects

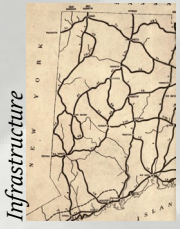
Cross continental
highway construction

Tool for commerce

Mode of ‘experiencing’
America

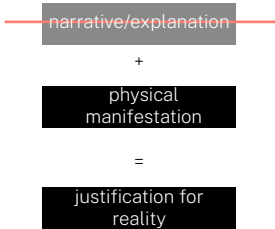


Literature / Arts



Infrastructure

afterlife



IN THE POST-TRUTH 21st CENTURY CONTEXT, WHERE PERCIEVED SOLUTIONS TO SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND ECONOMIC PRESSURES MEET ANYTHING LESS THAN FACT WITH RESISTANCE.

MYTHS FACE INCREASED SKEPTICISM, DISTANCING THEM AWAY FROM BEING A PART OF THE SOLUTION

MYTHS HOWEVER, ARE NECESSARY FOR THE REALIZATION TO THE PROPOSAL OF ANY REFORMED URBAN LANDSCAPE.

“Many of the [New Deal] civic structures and their art were deemed obsolete, too big, or too grand. No one was interested in seeing depictions of toiling laborers when their country was on a roll. During the 50s and 60s much of this part was neglected, or worse, removed entirely.”

Maresca, Joseph. WPA Buildings: Architecture and Art of the New Deal. (Schiffer, 2016), 121

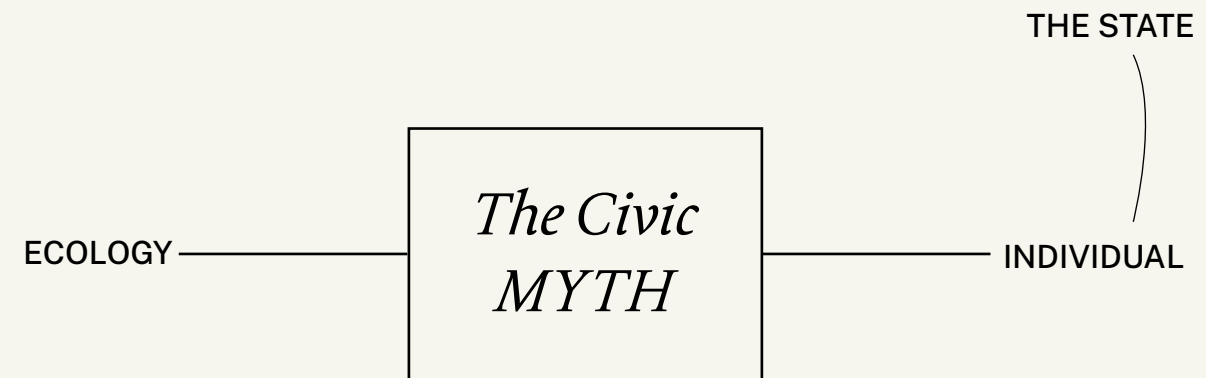
“There is no such society anymore as the gods once supported. The social unit is not a carrier of religious content, but an economic-political organization”

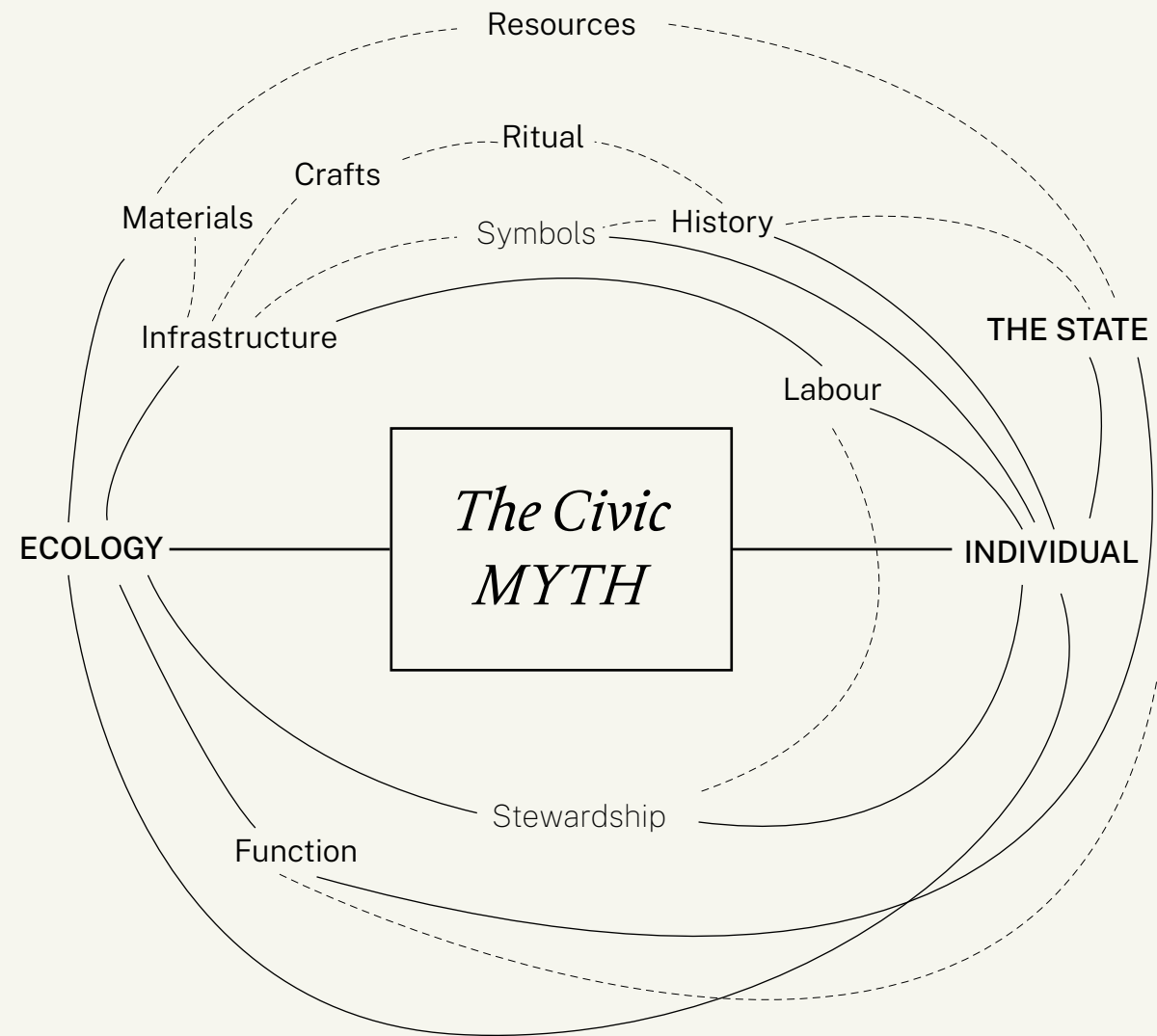
...
“Indeed, these conditions themselves are what have rendered the ancient formulae ineffective, misleading, and even pernicious. The community today is the planet, not the bounded nation; hence the patterns of projected aggression which formerly served to co-ordinate the in-group now can only break it into factions.”

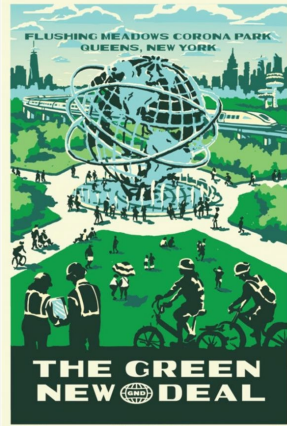
Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton University Press, 2004), 201-2

“In the world of post-truth, myths have resurged as unforeseeably powerful tools of civic battle. Myths have resurged, as instruments of social reform, in the elusive promise to unearth and destroy the complex and intransigent infrastructures of governance.”

Lydia Kallipoliti, Deviant Beasts of Post-Truth, Thresholds 2017 NO. 45, 14-28. Myth. MIT Press.







Mock-Up Poster shared by U.S. House Representative Alexandria Ocasio Cortez for The Green New Deal

Bronx & Queens GND posters

middle class that the United States has ever seen, but many members of frontline and vulnerable communities were excluded from many of the economic and societal benefits of those mobilizations; and

Whereas the House of Representatives recognizes that a new national, social, industrial, and economic mobilization on a scale not seen since World War II and the New Deal era is a historic opportunity—

- (1) to create millions of good, high-wage jobs in the United States;
- (2) to provide unprecedented levels of prosperity and economic security for all people of the United States; and
- (3) to counteract systemic injustices: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That it is the sense of the House of Representatives that—

(1) it is the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal—

(A) to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through a fair and just transition for all communities and workers;

(B) to create millions of good, high-wage jobs and ensure prosperity and economic security for all people of the United States;

(C) to invest in the infrastructure and industry of the United States to sustainably meet the challenges of the 21st century;



MYTHS, ARE NARRATIVES COMPOSED OF FICTITIOUS ELEMENTS TO SUPPLEMENT THE EXPLANATION OF A REALITY. BY THIS INTERPRETATION, MYTHS CAN BE EMBODIED BY OUR BUILT ENVIRONMENT, AS THEIR ASPIRATIONAL METAPHORS SERVE AS THE FICTIONAL ELEMENTS TOWARDS REAL SOCIAL PROMISE AND POTENTIAL.

HISTORICALLY MYTHS HAVE BEEN EMPLOYED IN GOVERNMENT ARCHITECTURE TO MOBILIZE, CIVILIANS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONALISTIC URBAN LANDSCAPES, AND THEREBY, THE FORMATION OF A UNIFYING IDENTITY THAT LEGITIMIZES THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE. IN ESSENCE, UTILIZING ARCHITECTURE AS PROPAGANDA.

IN THE POST-TRUTH 21st CENTURY CONTEXT, WHERE PERCIEVED SOLUTIONS TO SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND ECONOMIC PRESSURES MEET ANYTHING LESS THAN FACT WITH RESISTANCE. MYTHS FACE INCREASED SKEPTICISM, DISTANCING THEM AWAY FROM BEING A PART OF THE SOLUTION

MYTHS HOWEVER, ARE NECESSARY FOR THE REALIZATION OF ANY REFORMED URBAN LANDSCAPE PROPOSAL.

THIS THESIS SITUATES ITSELF WITHIN THE PREMISE OF A HYPOTHETICAL CONTEMPORARY URBAN REFORM -THE GREEN NEW DEAL- TO DESIGN AND INDEX POTENTIAL RETROFITS FOR A CIVIC TYPOLOGY.

THE DESIGN PROCESS WILL BE AN EXERCISE IN MYTH MAKING. BY RESTRUCTURING PREVIOUS ARCHITECTURE-MYTH FRAMEWORKS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND CITIZEN.

IN EFFECT, EMPHASIZING GREATER PARTICIPATION BY CITIZENS IN THE MYTH FORMATION, RATHER THAN A ONE-SIDED PROPAGANDA.

Little indication of function, and apathetic to civic engagement:



U.S. Post Office in McAllen, TX

Administrative problem with public transparency:

The process for relocating facilities was not always transparent. Further, the vice president, Facilities, has conflicting responsibilities for approving funding and adjudicating relocation appeals. We reviewed 33 of the 114 relocation projects we identified for fiscal years 2011 through 2013, and found 25 new site selections were not announced until after the public comment and appeal periods ended, and two had undetermined announcement dates. We found that only one of the 25 appeals filed for the 114 projects was upheld, leading management to halt the relocation. Further, the Postal Service could not readily identify the number of relocations and officials did not always efficiently manage the public notification and documentation process.

1

Recreate a civic typology using the new framework by creating a tool for public to more actively participate in design of their civic buildings.

- Catalog typological patterns
- Reinterpret patterns through possible interventions:
 - Mixed use program
 - Regional envelope responses to environment
 - Materiality
 - Incorporating increased Public Space
 - Reappropriate techniques from previous framework
 - Community involvement strategies
 - Materiality



2

Apply to a specific site

- Community voing process
- Assimilate to site
- Reduce energy use

DEC			FEB			MAR			APR		
14	Document Due	digital file	31 - 6	Environmental research	dwg + text	28 - 6	Poll a community	text	28 - 3	Iteration #2 / 3	dwg
16	First Draft Due	dwg + text	7 - 13	Speculative combinations	dwg	12	Final Text Due	text	5	CommonName Submission	dwg + text
			14 - 20	Catalog	dwg	7 - 13	Preliminary drawings	text	4 - 10	Drawings + Details	dwg
JAN			21 - 27	Catalog + Create Poll	dwg	19	Final Image Due	dwg	11 - 17	Renderings + Edits	images
17 - 24	Gather documentation	dwg				14 - 20	Iteration #1	dwg	18 - 24	Compile Guide(s)	dwg + model
25 - 30	Build typology catalog	dwg				21 - 27	Publication edits	dwg + models	25 - 1	Compile Guide(s)	text + dwg
									MAY		
									3 - 6	Finals	guides



Publication Deadline



Thesis Deadline



Work

